



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency Ideas for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA volunteers)

Every child deserves a forever family! Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever. *Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011* presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a *call to action* for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies a set of concrete actions that you, in your role as a CASA volunteer, can incorporate in your daily work to help achieve permanence for these children and youth.

Family and Youth Engagement

Every family and youth should have a voice. Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting efforts, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

What you can do...

- ☐ Always show respect and avoid judgmental comments; make it clear that you are listening; be as transparent and forthright as possible
- ☐ Ask parents and the child/youth what their understanding is of what is going on right now, what they would like to see happen and who else they would like to have involved to help them
- ☐ Inquire about and pay attention to the family's cultural background and how this may affect communication
- ☐ Ask the parents and youth to identify family and personal resources (not just financial) that have assisted them in the past to meet their needs or overcome struggles
- ☐ Ask the parents:
 - Their understanding of the initial reason that brought them into the system
 - Their understanding of the expectations placed upon them
 - Which services they are participating in and for what purpose
 - The goals they have while under the court's jurisdiction

Family Preservation

First and foremost children belong with their birth families. In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

What you can do...

- ☐ Assess if the services the family is getting are based on their needs and not only on what services seem available in their community; advocate for culturally appropriate services
- ☐ Look and listen for positive connections that parents and children already have and for other relationships with the potential to become stronger supports for the family
- ☐ Ask the parents what they feel they need to keep their children in the home that is not already being provided; listen to their answers—do not tell them what they need
- ☐ Ask the child and other family members what additional services or assistance they believe would be beneficial
- ☐ Ask for the child's input on discipline, routines, and consistency; observe what parenting strategies work with each child

Placement and Reunification

Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home. When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

What you can do...

- ☐ Ask parents and children/youth about other family members, friends, “emergency contacts”, teachers, coaches, church members and others that might be a part of the reunification plan—report findings
- ☐ Regularly verify that family interactions are taking place (including siblings); recommend immediate resolutions when interactions are not occurring or are not increasing at a planned rate
- ☐ Have the parents tell you in their own words what they understand needs to be accomplished for reunification and how they see themselves accomplishing those things
- ☐ Encourage as much ongoing parental contact with the children/youth as possible (e.g., cards, e-mails, phone calls as well as visits; advocate for stronger family interactions with more “natural” interactions such as reviewing homework, attending school activities, preparing meals, helping at nap or bath time
- ☐ Make sure parents understand reunification timelines and court expectations and regularly remind them if necessary; review court orders with parents

Adoption and Guardianship

Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency. Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size.

When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

What you can do...

- ☐ Make sure you know the child/youth well enough to make permanency recommendations in their best interest
- ☐ Recommend and monitor the adequacy of active concurrent planning throughout the life of the case
- ☐ Ask parents and extended family members about family connections that might be permanency options for the child/youth—let these connections know they must voice interest and take steps early on (specify timeframes), or they could be eliminated from consideration as other placements will need to be explored
- ☐ Talk to the child/youth about people they feel are influential in their lives and ask them who they could imagine living with
- ☐ Contact potential permanent connections and ask them about their concerns for the child/youth and what they or others might be able to do to help
- ☐ Visit potential pre-adoptive placements

Transitioning to Adulthood

It is never too late to achieve permanence. Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational, and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

What you can do...

- ☐ Recommend transition planning as early in the case as possible; request a Dream Team meeting
- ☐ Talk with the youth about others in their life with whom they want to stay connected; encourage/help the youth reach out to these people with their case worker
- ☐ Find out what the youth wants and help communicate this to others
- ☐ Encourage youth to take advantage of the opportunities offered (e.g. Dream Teams, Iowa Aftercare Services, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), college financial assistance, AMP), and to voluntarily stay in foster care until they graduate from high school
- ☐ Ask the youth what his/her goals are beyond age 18; help ensure there are steps in the transition plan to help achieve their goals